

Washington, DC – Continuing his effort to find methods of reducing school crime and to institute crime-preventing regulations, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA – 07) has submitted a resolution expressing Congressional support for the designation of September 2009, as National Campus Safety Awareness Month (NCSAM). The Congressman introduced a resolution that passed the House last year to create NCSAM in 2008, when he partnered with Security on Campus, a local organization long active in promoting awareness of campus violence and in finding ways to reduce crime. The House voted unanimously in favor of that measure, which complements the work the Congressman has done in the District – where he has hosted an Anti-Violence Summit as well as education summits that have addressed the issue of ways to reduce violence – and in Washington, where he has advocated for better reporting of incidents in schools.

“I was proud to sponsor this resolution last year and look forward to continuing to help build on the wonderful work done by Security on Campus to ensure campus safety remains a prominent issue,” said Congressman Sestak. “We are more aware now than ever about the importance of keeping our nation’s college students safe. National Campus Safety Awareness Month, which comes at the beginning of the new school year, offers a perfect opportunity to provide students with critical awareness that they need to help stay safe on campus. Campuses, like any other community, have to deal with crime and this awareness better equips every member of the community to protect themselves and prevent crime.”

Currently, in accordance with the federal Jeanne Clery Act, the nation’s colleges and universities are required to publish and distribute an Annual Campus Security Report, maintain a public log of all crimes reported to them, and provide warnings of crimes that represent a threat to the security of students and employees. From these reports, it has been revealed that 37 homicides, 8,114 forcible-sex offenses, 8,923 aggravated assaults, and 3,071 cases of arson occurred on campus from 2004 to 2006. Additionally, between one fifth and one quarter of female undergraduates will be the victim of a completed or attempted rape, usually by someone they know, during their college careers; however, fewer than five percent of these incidents are reported to the police according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

As part of the process of producing this resolution, the Congressman met with representatives from Security on Campus Inc., an organization based in King of Prussia that was founded by the parents of Jeanne Clery, who was raped and murdered as a student at Lehigh University. The Clerys and staff have worked tirelessly to improve campus safety and security throughout the country, including working to pass six federal laws dealing with college campus safety- most notably, the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crimes Statistics Act.

To address violence in secondary schools, Congressman Sestak made the topic one of the themes of a field hearing on No Child Left Behind held at Radnor High School. The hearing was attended by Dale Kildee, Chairman on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education. Radnor Middle School Principal Anthony Stevenson testified about the need to have a “positive and welcoming school climate” to help students “avoid high risk behaviors like substance abuse and violence.”

The Congressman has used the comments he has heard in the District to try to make practical legislation in Washington, where he has worked on a related amendment to the No Child Left Behind Act. Since an Education Committee hearing on dropout prevention when Members questioned panel witnesses on the problem of underreporting of student violence and crime, Congressman Sestak has advocated to include in the legislation standard reporting metrics that would ensure that the federal government can collect appropriate data to effect policies that improve school safety. Part of the problem relates to the “persistently dangerous” school label under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, as school administrators fear backlash from parents, the community, and media. For example, during the 2003-04 school year, only 26 of the nation's 91,000 public schools were labeled “persistently dangerous.” Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia proudly reported that they were home to not a single unsafe school.

“We must make certain that school administrators operate in conditions under which they are comfortable with fully disclosing violent acts,” said Congressman Sestak. “Additionally, appropriate metrics must be put in place to ensure that the federal government can collect such data to effect policies to improve the safety of our nation’s schools. Until we can correctly define the problems that we have both at secondary and post-secondary schools, it will be extremely difficult to combat violence effectively.”

Last year, the Congressman’s Anti-Violence Summit featured panels of local experts, law enforcement officers, and religious and community leaders who discussed the role of violence in our community and how interfaith and community organizations can partner with elected officials to reduce it. Specifically, panelists and audience members mentioned ways to steer youth away from activities and groups that can lead to involvement in illegal activities.

“I fully recognize that violence and crime know no boundaries,” said Congressman Sestak in discussing the critical need to bring together a variety of leaders to address the issue. “We need the full force of our citizens, community organizations, religious leaders and elected officials as

we seek pragmatic solutions to violence and its causes.”

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the Congress.*

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